



Program Accomplishments

Equipment Deployment and Networking

The NIBIN network currently includes a total of 98 sites with IBIS equipment, each a Federal, State or local forensic laboratory. The current sites are located in 27 states nationwide. ATF anticipates that by the end of 2001, the first half of the nationwide rollout will be complete, including 171 sites in 40 states. There will be 233 sites in the completed network, and the technology will be available in every state in the United States. Some police departments not scheduled to receive NIBIN equipment are already cooperating to gain access to the system through other agencies.

NIBIN's effectiveness in matching new entries to archived entries increases directly with the number of images available for searching. As of December 31, 2000, there were 346,967 images resident in ATF's NIBIN network. These entries have resulted in 3100 "hits," or matches. By connecting crimes, these hits provide invaluable investigative leads for the detectives working to solve the crime.

ATF and the FBI have worked together to create the NIBIN network in the most cost-efficient way possible. By advance purchase of IBIS units, ATF ensured that it received the best possible prices on them. All options for networking NIBIN were explored; this advance research made it possible to deploy the first two regions of the rollout on a frame relay network, creating the opportunity to get IBIS machines installed and in use by NIBIN partners as quickly as possible.

Partner Information and Liaison

ATF's NIBIN Program staff use a variety of means to keep NIBIN partners informed as the network develops. In calendar year 2000, NIBIN team members

made a total of 23 presentations to State and local governments and to law enforcement organizations. Program staff are also available to assist and advise as needed. One newly emergent issue has been the development and implementation of State ballistic imaging laws; NIBIN Program staff have met with officials in 3 States to advise on how the implementation of these laws can interact with the resources available through NIBIN.

Letters and newsletters update NIBIN partners on recent developments as the network grows. An informational video about the NIBIN program, describing how ATF and our partners have used IBIS to assist in solving firearms-related violent crimes, has been produced. The website www.nibin.gov has been expanded to offer more information to firearms examiners and the public.

ATF has sought the input of NIBIN partners in the development of every area of the program. State and local users of IBIS equipment have assisted in equipment evaluation and in beta-testing the training programs proposed by FTL. ATF requested this input from State and local law enforcement agencies in order to ensure that the equipment deployed meets the needs of users and that the training provided covers all necessary issues and anticipates likely questions.

ATF has also worked with its cooperating agencies to adapt IBIS equipment for maximum effectiveness. A good example of this is the successful resolution of the issue of returned firearms. At some sites, firearms that have been seized, testfired and entered into IBIS can then leave law enforcement custody and return to public circulation. The program conducting correlations in IBIS assumed that a testfired firearm would not return to public circulation and therefore would never match against future assault/homicide crimes occurring after the firearm's entry. This situation pro-

duced concerns that some testfired firearms could be used in future crimes and yet be untraceable through IBIS. In response to their concerns, ATF convened a working group in November 2000, including representatives from ATF, FTI, the FBI, and State and local law enforcement. After researching the problem and potential solutions, the group reached a solution involving alterations to the search parameters. The resolution of this issue demonstrates that constructive input from NIBIN partners strengthens the NIBIN program and improves IBIS functionality.

Program Support

Consistent with the NIBIN Strategic Plan, a sufficient infrastructure has been put in place in the ATF NIBIN Program office in ATF Headquarters to support program operations. Additional staff members have been hired to ensure that the vital functions of NIBIN partner support, contract oversight, and informational matters can be performed and long-term planning can be undertaken.

ATF National Firearms Examiner Academy

Automated ballistics technology such as that employed in the NIBIN Program is very useful for narrowing the list of possible firearms from which a projectile or casings may originate. However, a qualified firearms examiner must make the final identification. The skill and knowledge required to conduct firearms examinations and comparisons could once be acquired only through extended on-the-job training and apprenticeships; no formal training program existed at a National level. However, the apprenticeship method alone cannot provide the number of examiners needed to manage an increasing firearms workload. It is estimated that there are only 850 qualified firearms examiners in the entire United States.

To provide a partial solution to this dilemma, ATF has created a National Firearms Examiner Academy to serve as a training source for Federal, State, and local firearms examiners. The program provides intensive training for police laboratory personnel who make technical determinations and provide expert testimony regarding firearm and tool marks on recovered evi-

dence (primarily cartridge casings and projectiles from firearms.) The National Firearms Examiner Academy has developed a training curriculum that is becoming an all-inclusive benchmark for education in this field. The curriculum is composed of the fundamentals of firearms and toolmark examinations and serves as the basis for the trainee, under supervision, to develop into a qualified firearms and toolmark examiner. Two classes have now graduated from the Academy; the 18 graduates have returned to their communities to combat violent crime.

Cops and Docs

The ATF Forensic Science Laboratory in Atlanta initiated a project to increase the amount of bullet evidence entered into IBIS from the Atlanta metropolitan area. Emory University's Dr. Arthur L. Kellermann, Professor and Director of the Center for Injury Control, worked with ATF to establish the "Cops and Docs Program." Dr. Kellermann assisted ATF in implementing procedures with Grady Memorial Hospital's administration and staff.

ATF learned that the Grady Hospital Operating Room staff did not have a procedure in place for processing extracted bullets from gunshot victims. The bullets were either discarded or set aside and never submitted to a forensic laboratory for evaluation. In August 1998, ATF installed a drop box in Grady Memorial Hospital's Operating Room. The box was installed to ensure bullets recovered from gunshot victims are properly secured and entered into IBIS. ATF's local NIBIN Coordinator picks up the bullets weekly from the box and delivers them to the ATF Laboratory. The staff at Grady Hospital's Operating Room is extremely pleased with this program, and ATF is obtaining valuable bullet evidence.

Bosnian War Crimes Evidence

In November 1997, the ATF National Forensic Science Laboratory, Rockville, Maryland, began receiving firearms-related evidence from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The evidence, a total of 1466 cartridge casings in two submissions, was collected from the Ovcara mass burial site in Bosnia. ATF firearms examiners processed the

cartridge casings and entered them into IBIS; they then arranged the cartridge casings in IBIS correlation groups and performed intercomparisons of all cartridge casings in an attempt to identify the total number of firearms used at the sites.

After exhaustive comparisons, 18 different firearms were identified as being involved in the mass murder of persons at Ovcará. An ATF Laboratory report outlining the identification and conclusions was sent to the prosecutors. In the summer of 1998, the Tribunal

in The Hague, Netherlands, tried an individual accused of participating in the atrocities at Ovcará. The prosecution team used the laboratory analysis report to corroborate testimony of two eyewitnesses. Their testimony established that the person being tried was one of 18 persons present during the massacre. That person was found guilty of war crimes. This case, which would have been impossible to complete without IBIS due to time and personnel constraints, has come to a successful conclusion.